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FILE ONLY

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The Morison Case

BROKAW: In this year of revelations about spies, moles and counterspies, there is also the case of Samuel Morison. Next Wednesday, he'll be sentenced for espionage. However, as NBC correspondent Carl Stern reports now, this case is different. Morison wasn't spying for a foreign country. He said he was trying to warn us about a Soviet threat.

5 CARL STERN: Samuel Morison may have changed America in a way he never intended. He is the first man convicted of spying for making information public and could be sentenced to forty years in prison.

STEPHEN TROTT: He violated the federal law, and he's been convicted. It's that simple.

CHRISTOPHER TOWNSEND: I think it's overreaction, over-kill, and I don't think it's correct.

CAPTAIN THOMAS MORSE: I know that Sam in no way would prejudice national security. He loves his country too much.

STERN: Morison is the grandson of famed naval historian Samuel Elliot Morison. He worked for the Navy as an expert on fighting ships and had a parttime job, with the Navy's permission, as the U. S. editor of a British military magazine.

What got him in trouble were these satellite photos of construction of a Soviet nuclear aircraft carrier, which he obtained in his Navy employment. He got off the classified designation and sent them off to the magazine. He got no extra pay for them. Morison's uncle says he acted out of patriotism.

EDWARD SPINGARN: His purpose was to alert public opinion in this country and in

Britain and other NATO countries concerning a growing Soviet naval threat. He felt that in doing so, he would enhance national security, not diminish national security.

STERN: A former CIA official says no harm was done.

ROLAND INLOW: From an information content point of view, the photography did not reveal anything that was not already published.

STERN: Yet the government decided to charge Morison with espionage for leaking the classified photos.

TROTT: We are not -- I don't think we are -- heavy-handed or crazy about this. But when we're confronted with a situation that's serious -- and we believe the Morison case was serious -- we intend to follow through and prosecute.

STERN: But why hit so hard at Morison, a decorated veteran of Vietnam combat who could have been punished by a demotion or by being fired?

WILLIAM COLBY: This is an attempt to impose greater discipline upon the all-too-current habit of talking, showing documents, giving documents away to the press.